



USE OF TANF ACTIVITIES AND OPINIONS ABOUT WORKFIRST

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This report describes results of the 2002 wave of the WorkFirst Study (WFS). The study sample consists of three cohorts. The first cohort was drawn from the statewide list of adults receiving welfare assistance in March 1999. The second and third cohorts were drawn from the statewide list of adults receiving welfare assistance in October 2000 and 2001, respectively. Data used in this report is drawn from 1,400 re-interviews with the first cohort, 749 re-interviews with the second cohort, and 1,011 first-time interviews with the third cohort.

This report describes survey data on the use of TANF activities and opinions about the WorkFirst program. The questions address use and perceived helpfulness of TANF activities, perceptions of how the respondents' lives had changed in the past year, perceived likelihood of continuing to receive benefits in the future, and general impressions of the WorkFirst program. Responses are compared between cohorts, as well as aggregated to provide a broad picture.

FINDINGS

- Nearly two-thirds of WorkFirst Study respondents believed that their lives had improved over the past year; about fifteen percent felt their lives had gotten worse.
- Most respondents had a positive impression of WorkFirst (69 percent).

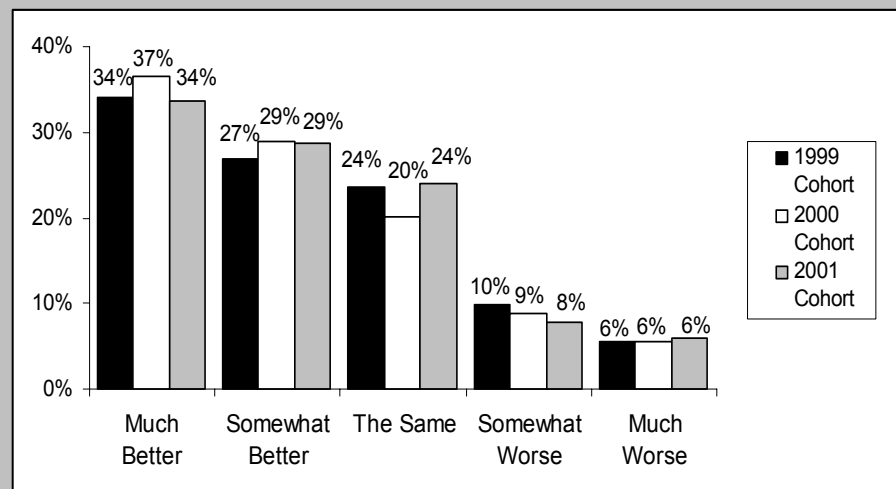
Nearly two-thirds believed WorkFirst was helpful in promoting self-sufficiency, and four-fifths believed they were unlikely to receive WorkFirst benefits in a year.

- About three-fifths of respondents left WorkFirst in the year prior to the survey. Of those who left, over half left for new or higher-paying jobs. Far more respondents left for this reason than any other.
- Two-thirds of respondents thought WorkFirst was helpful in promoting self-sufficiency (68 percent in 2000, 65 percent in 2001). And most felt that they were unlikely to be receiving WorkFirst benefits in a year (77 percent in 2001, 81 percent in 2002).
- Caseworkers, Job Search, Individual Responsibility Plans, and Job Coaches were all believed to be helpful or very helpful in promoting self-sufficiency by a majority of users.
- Three-fifths of respondents suggested improvements to WorkFirst. Improving staff was the most frequent recommendation in each cohort, including more personnel, better training, and more time to meet with staff. From all cohorts was a consistent call for a greater emphasis on education (12 percent), more individualized service (12 percent), and enhanced choice in jobs and training (10 percent).

Quality of Life

Figure 1 depicts perceptions of quality of life for each cohort. Combining responses from all cohorts, about two thirds (63 percent) of respondents reported an increase in their quality of life between 2001 and 2002. About a quarter (23 percent) reported no change. Fourteen percent reported a decrease in quality of life. There was little variation between cohorts.

**FIGURE 1:
PERCEIVED
CHANGES IN
QUALITY OF LIFE,
2002 SURVEY**



General Impressions of WorkFirst

Figure 2 depicts overall impressions among the three cohorts of WorkFirst, perceived usefulness of the program toward becoming self-sufficient, and perceived likelihood of no longer using the program within a year of being surveyed.

Combining cohorts, most respondents (69 percent) reported a positive impression of WorkFirst, with 22 percent reporting a very positive experience. Fourteen percent reported a very negative impression of WorkFirst. The program was rated slightly lower than in 2001, when 72 percent of respondents reported a positive experience and 27 percent reported a very positive experience.

Roughly two-thirds of respondents in each cohort rated WorkFirst as helpful in achieving self-sufficiency. Respondents belonging to the 1999 cohort, who have been involved in the WorkFirst study since its inception, indicated the greatest expectation of not using WorkFirst. Respondents belonging to the 2001 cohort indicated the least expectation of no longer using the program within a year. In each cohort a strong majority of respondents expect to no longer receive benefits in a year.

**FIGURE 2:
OVERALL
IMPRESSION
OF WORKFIRST,
2002 SURVEY**

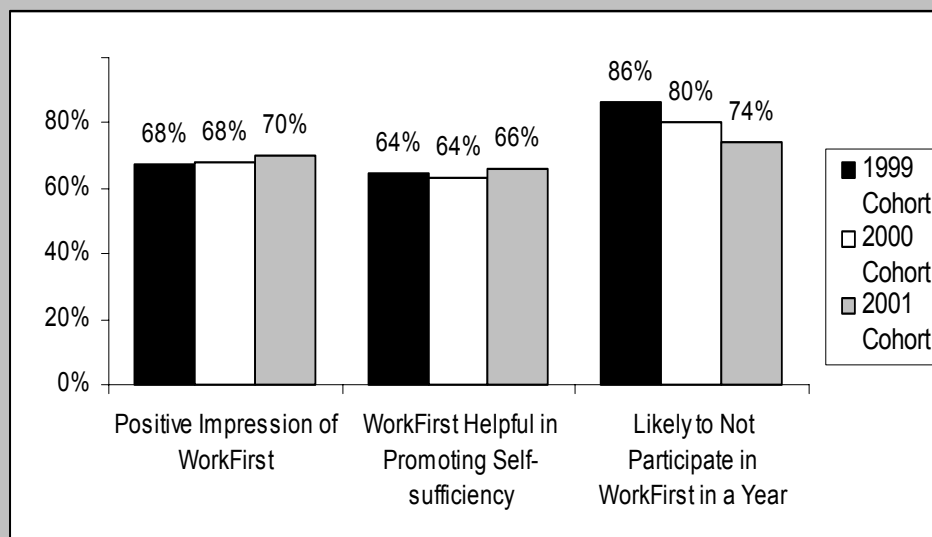
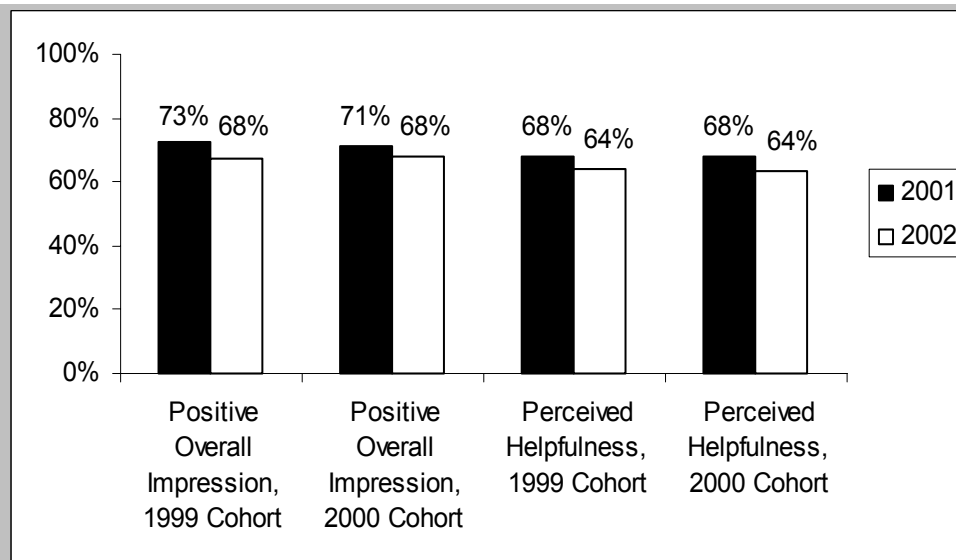


Figure 3 depicts changes in perceptions of WorkFirst from 2001 to 2002. Comparing current opinions of the 1999 and 2000 cohorts to those expressed previously in the 2001 survey, a decline in impression and perceived helpfulness of WorkFirst is apparent. While the majority of 2002 survey respondents reported a positive impression of WorkFirst and the opinion that the program had been helpful in promoting self-sufficiency, ratings fell from the previous survey.

**FIGURE 3:
PERCEPTION
OF WORKFIRST,
2001-2002**



Reasons for Leaving WorkFirst

As reported above, the majority of respondents surveyed believe they will not be using the program in a year. Combining cohorts, nearly three-fifths of respondents indicated that they had left WorkFirst at some point since October 2001.

Table 1 depicts the reasons for leaving WorkFirst given by respondents in each cohort. Among the respondents who had left WorkFirst in the year preceding the survey, most indicated that they were

able to leave WorkFirst because of work. Combining cohorts, over half (54 percent) of respondents left the program after finding a new or better paying job. Other reasons given for departure included a desire to avoid using up their 60 months of TANF eligibility, marriage, and relocation.

Table 1: Reasons for Leaving WorkFirst, 2002 Survey

Ten percent of those who left did so in order to avoid reaching the 60-month limit on eligibility. Another 7 percent found the demands of the program to be too much of a hassle. Four percent were removed for failing to comply with requirements, reaching the eligibility limit, or other reasons. Another 4 percent were no longer eligible following an increase in household income. Three percent ceased participation after beginning to receive Social Security benefits. Another 3 percent left the program following marriage. Two percent stopped participating after moving. While receipt of unemployment compensation was very rarely cited as the reason for leaving by members of the first and second cohorts to leave WorkFirst, it occurred slightly more frequently among the 2001 cohort (2 percent).

About one-tenth of respondents (11 percent) left WorkFirst for a variety of other reasons. Among

reasons cited were lack of need (3 percent), receipt of child support (2 percent), choosing to stay at home to care for children (1 percent), conflicts with attending school (1 percent), and miscellaneous others (5 percent).

Reasons for Returning to WorkFirst

Not all respondents who left WorkFirst stayed off. While over half (59 percent) of respondents reported leaving the program during the year preceding the survey, one-fifth (21 percent) reported returning. Table 2 depicts the reasons given in each cohort for returning to WorkFirst.

Among those returning, the most frequently mentioned reason was difficulty in finding work. Looking at combined responses from the cohorts, nearly a quarter of the leavers (24 percent) indicated trouble finding a job. This was especially prevalent among members of the 2001 cohort, with 28 percent returning after being unable to find a job. Also frequently cited as a reason for returning was losing a job. Over one-fifth (22 percent) of returning respondents had lost their job.

Table 2: Reasons for Returning to WorkFirst, 2002 Survey

	1999 Cohort	2000 Cohort	2001 Cohort
<i>Unable to Find a Job</i>	23%	19%	28%
<i>Lost Job</i>	22%	20%	23%
<i>Other</i>	22%	25%	21%
<i>Pay at Job Too Low</i>	8%	13%	11%
<i>Pregnancy/Childbirth</i>	9%	11%	8%
<i>Sickness</i>	11%	12%	7%
<i>Personal Problems</i>	12%	10%	6%
<i>Separated/Divorced</i>	3%	2%	5%
<i>Childcare Too Expensive</i>	4%	4%	5%
<i>Disability</i>	3%	0%	3%
<i>Unable to Get Child Support</i>	1%	2%	2%
<i>Child Sick or Disabled</i>	0%	2%	1%
<i>Sick or Disabled Family Member</i>	1%	1%	1%

Use and Helpfulness of Programs

Figure 4 displays the percentage of respondents in each cohort who reported ever using any of four WorkFirst programs. Responses are compared between the 2001 and 2002 surveys. Use of WorkFirst programs was higher among respondents in the 2000 and 2001 cohorts. In all cohorts Job Search was reported the most highly used program, followed by the Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP). Fewer respondents reported use of Washington Post-Employment Labor Exchange (WPLEX) or Job Coach services. With the exception of the decline in WPLEX usage among members of the 1999 cohort, there has been an upswing in usage of WorkFirst programs.

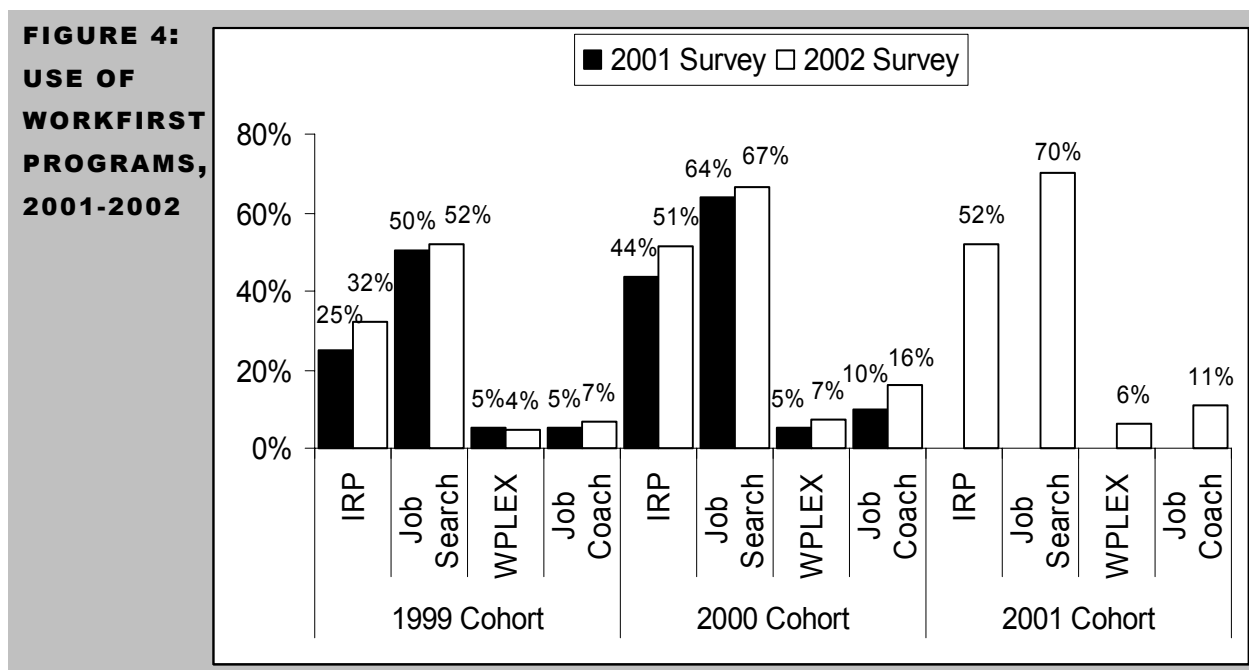
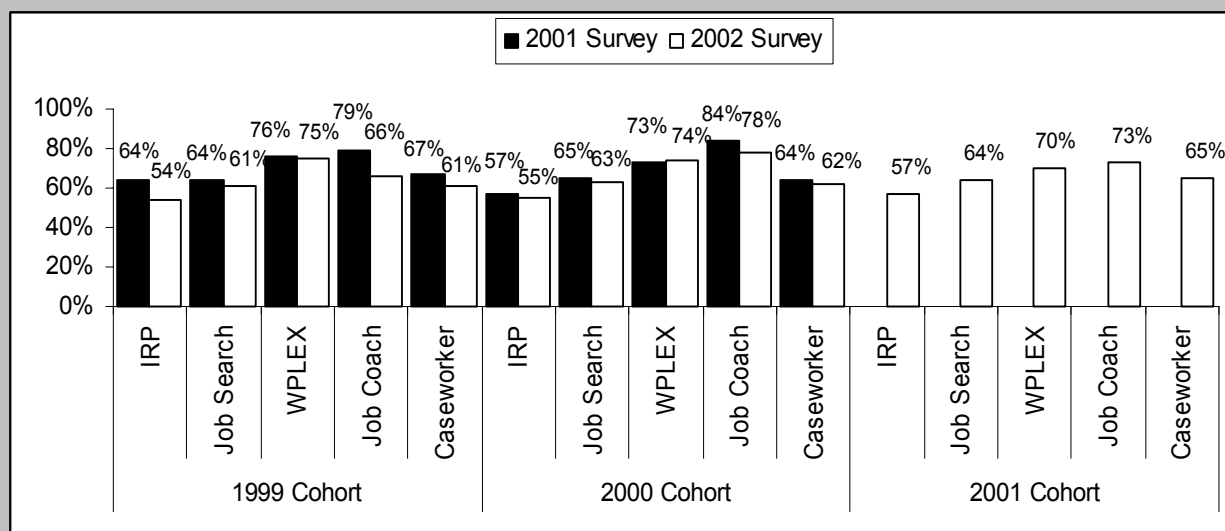


Figure 5 reports the percent of users in each cohort who reported the programs as very or somewhat helpful in moving towards self-sufficiency in responses to the 2001 and 2002 surveys. Most users found caseworkers, Job Search, IRP, Job Coach, and WPLEX to be helpful programs. Looking at the three cohorts combined, nearly three-quarters of users reported Job Coach (74 percent) and WPLEX (73 percent) to be helpful. Caseworkers and Job Search were reported as helpful by 63 percent of all users. Over half of users (55 percent) found the IRP to be helpful. Looking at the cohorts that participated in both the 2001 and 2002 surveys, there is a consistent downgrading of program helpfulness.

FIGURE 5: PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF WORKFIRST PROGRAMS, 2001-2002



Respondents were also asked if any other programs were helpful to them in promoting self-sufficiency. Over a quarter (27 percent) of all survey respondents indicated that other programs had been beneficial. Figure 6 displays the percent of respondents in each cohort who reported different aspects of WorkFirst helpful. In each cohort, support services, WorkFirst classes, and workshops were frequently cited. Staff support was another aspect of WorkFirst frequently cited as helpful.

Between 6 percent and 9 percent of respondents in each cohort reported that WorkFirst classes and workshops had been helpful. Of these respondents, a third named general WorkFirst courses and nearly a third (31 percent) mentioned assistance with writing and editing resumes. About a fifth (18 percent) mentioned interview and application training, while another 15 percent cited Job Search workshops. A few individuals said that the speakers at WorkFirst classes were helpful.

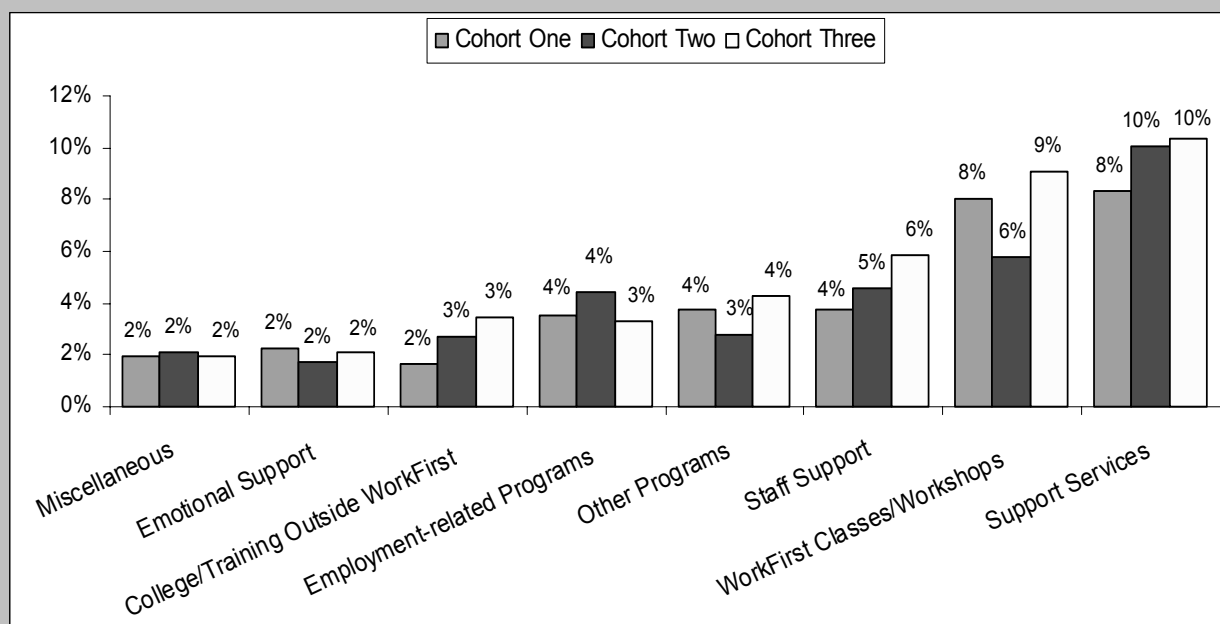
Staff support was reported as helpful by between 4 percent and 6 percent of respondents in each cohort. Of the respondents citing staff support, a quarter (25 percent) referred to their caseworker while the remainder (75 percent) indicated other workers or staff in general.

Between 3 percent and 4 percent of respondents in each cohort reported that employment-related programs were helpful. Of these respondents, about one fifth (22 percent) mentioned Work Experience (WEX), another fifth (21 percent) mentioned the Community Jobs program, and 7 percent cited Career Path. The remaining half mentioned other programs.

Training outside of WorkFirst was mentioned by 2 percent to 3 percent of respondents in each cohort. Most (67 percent) referred to college courses or vocational/technical schools. The remaining third mentioned receiving their GED (10 percent), computer training (3 percent), and other training opportunities (20 percent).

Approximately 2 percent of respondents in each cohort mentioned emotional support gained through WorkFirst, and another 2 percent cited miscellaneous other aspects of WorkFirst.

FIGURE 6: ASPECTS OF WORKFIRST REPORTED HELPFUL, 2002 SURVEY



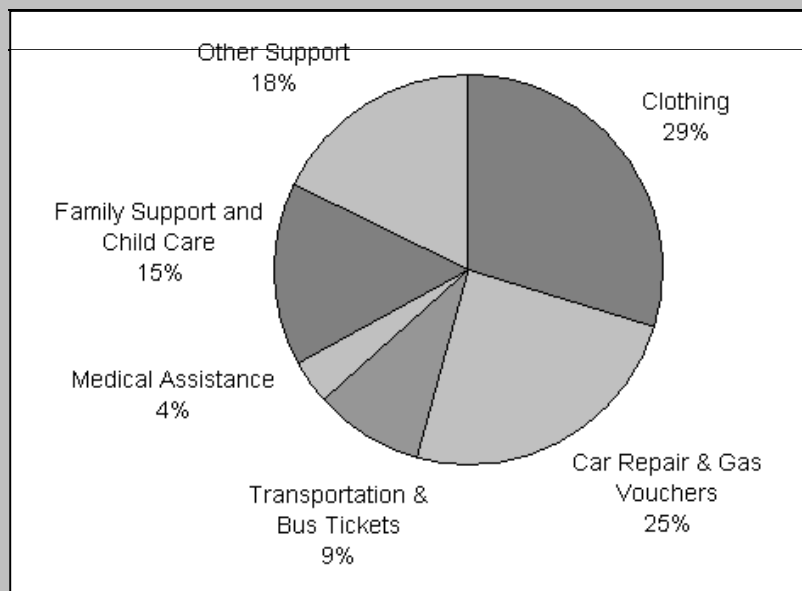
Support Services

About 10 percent of all respondents cited support services as being helpful toward achieving self-sufficiency. Consistently in each cohort, assistance with clothing for interviews and assistance with automobile-related expenses ranked highest. While responses were similar for each cohort, the 1999 cohort placed greater emphasis on the importance of family support and childcare, and less emphasis on transportation and bus tickets. About one-fifth (21 percent) of responses from the 1999 cohort pertained to family support, compared to 12 percent and 11 percent in the 2000 and 2001 cohorts, respectively. Only 5 percent of responses from the 1999 cohort reflected use of transportation and bus tickets, compared to 11 percent and 12 percent of responses from the 2000 and 2001 cohorts, respectively.

Figure 7 depicts the percentage of responses from all cohorts combined for each category. Almost a third (29 percent) of responses indicated that clothing assistance to be helpful toward becoming self-sufficient. One-quarter (25 percent) reported car repairs and gas vouchers to be helpful. Family support (including child support and family planning) and assistance with childcare were cited in 15 percent of responses.

Cited less frequently were bus tickets or transportation helpful (9 percent), and medical assistance (4 percent). Eighteen percent mentioned other support services.

FIGURE 7:
SUPPORT SERVICES
REPORTED HELPFUL,
2002 SURVEY,
(ALL COHORTS)



Suggested Improvements to WorkFirst

Survey respondents were asked how TANF programs, including WorkFirst, could be improved. Figure 8 displays the distribution of combined responses from each cohort. Over half (62 percent) of all respondents gave an answer to this question. Looking broadly at the cohorts, staff improvements, more flexible service, and miscellaneous changes were the most frequent suggestions. Responses are similar to those given in the previous wave of surveys.

Of those responding to the question, 27 percent suggested improving the staff and having more time with the staff, especially one-on-one time. Also of concern were the size of worker caseloads, timely response to phone calls to caseworkers, and greater empathy among staff for clients' circumstances.

Ten percent said the system should be more individualized, with flexible service that reflects case-by-case needs and individual circumstances. On a similar note, another 6 percent recommended that the system strive to meet the special needs of clients and their families, including medical conditions, disabilities, and drug and alcohol addiction. Some mentioned the unique needs of WorkFirst participants living in rural areas and economically depressed areas.

Fifteen percent mentioned a range of miscellaneous improvements, ranging from less time spent in WorkFirst offices to less pressure to get jobs quickly and greater emphasis on finding a desirable job. Some wanted the five-year limit to be raised or removed.

Seven percent requested increased support services such as car repair, childcare assistance, gas vouchers, and assistance with purchasing clothing necessary for interviews and jobs. Less frequently mentioned suggestions included reducing paperwork and increasing eligibility to make the system easier to use, and improving dissemination of information about available programs to ensure clients' awareness of programs such as medical assistance, car repair, or childcare reimbursement. Others felt that the system should be stricter and abusers should be dealt with.

**FIGURE 8:
SUGGESTED
IMPROVEMENTS
TO WORKFIRST,
2002 SURVEY,
(ALL COHORTS)**

